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Ecologies of Memory

By Tom Graham

Acceptance in Partial Completion
In Requirement for the Degree
Master of Arts

Kathleen L. Kitto, Dean of Graduate School

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MASTER'S THESIS

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Tom Graham
5/11/2012

Ecologies of Memory

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of
Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By
Tom Graham
May 2012

Abstract

Ecologies of Memory is a short story collection that explores conceptions and fallibility of memory and how it intersects with love, belief, and the formation of identity.

“Processes of Erosion,” the first story in the collection, addresses memory as a geological process in the form of a glacier scraping a small Alaskan town off the map. This presents the idea of memory as a *topological* feature: something that can't necessarily be controlled, that intrudes into our homes and heads.

“Vespers” continues this theme in the character of Bill. His wife, Anna, has just left him suddenly, and he's forced to engage with two types of memory. He feels compelled to treat the instance as an investigation, pouring over manuscripts, his external memory, in order to find what went wrong. Simultaneously he's attempting to fix her in place, knowing that his memory of her is ephemeral. Ultimately, akin to the glacier, he finds himself closed off, monastic life intrudes as he is unable to effectively deal with the loss.

The story “A Body Always, Already” attempts to identify ways that memory is involved in the formation of identity. Ariel is a character in trouble. She is attempting to self-actualize, to make a life for herself, but is unable to do so, due to the identity of the self her father tried to make of her. Here her past self is intruding on the present, the mechanism being a new-age church, and she is forced to come to terms with this dissonance.

The final story of the collection, “Random Access” returns to the character of Bill, now married to a psychiatrist named Lily. Lily is working in clinical trials using a drug that allows memories to supersede reality. Bill becomes addicted to the past, returning to his first wife and opening up the old wounds he had sealed in “Vespers.” As Bill seeks to perfect his memories of Anna, he comes to face the unsettling proposition that he might be remembering incorrectly, or even manufacturing memories, destroying the authenticity that gives the drug such allure. The collection ends with Lily taking the drug herself attempting to find one point of vivid happiness in her life. She cycles into the past until she at last settles on a memory of the womb, but the reader knows, tragically, that this must be a confabulation. This draws attention to the possibility that our most fondly remembered instances might be manufactured.

The collection explores memory even to the degree we represent the past in fiction. Mechanisms are created to allow flashback to diagetically take place, taking the reader to the past as the characters experience it, as intrusive ecologies, taking on lives of their own.

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Processes of Erosion

Ivonof Bay, a fishing village on Alaska's west coast, consisted of 25 housing units, two trawlers, and a number of out buildings and sheds. In their post office (the only designated public building) was a painting of the glacier that lurked above the town portrayed as a yeti, an abominable snow beast, with arms threatening to engulf every house in its embrace.

The year the glacier first hit town was a panicked one. In the summer months everyone stood at the glacier's edge shaking their heads. In a surge, one warm summer week, the melt water flooded John's basement, and the lip of the glacier hit the Roberts' house, not sliding the house off its foundation, but actually entering into his dining room. At first devastated, Gordon Roberts eventually gained a sense of humor about the situation. He went on about his business as usual, having guests on particularly warm summer days and joked how naturally cool his house had become. He was going to get an air conditioner he said, but now, he didn't feel that was necessary. So when the family dined the glacier dined with them. When Gordon had his scotch, he chipped some ice off the glacier as solace, glacier water being the purest, and "only the purest water," he said, "should dilute good scotch."

John, however, was a worrywart. He left his house every day and measure the distance between his house and the wall of ice. Everyday seemed to come a little closer: an eighth of an inch, a half an inch. One time, he thought it even moved a full foot and when he announced that about town everyone thought he was crazy. John obviously just didn't have a good system of measurement.

Henry, the glaciologist, imported from Washington, was having a love affair with the glacier. At least, that's what it seemed to the rest of the village, when Henry

would refer to it as *her*, call her the eloquent destroyer and a force for the ecology of disaster. He would take long hikes on the glacier with spiked shoes and two poles strapped to his sides, to provide some degree of protection should he accidentally stumble upon a crevasse. He would go far up into the mountains, camp along the glacier's edge, sometimes seen as a pinprick fire. Henry knew that after long periods of time, geologic time, an ecosystem's productivity declines from the lack of necessary minerals and nutrients. It takes a catastrophic disaster to expose bedrock and thus essential nutrients from the earth's crust. This could come in the form of a massive earthquake, a volcanic eruption, or, perhaps most peculiarly, a glacier that when receded forms the blank slate necessary to renew resources. It struck him that this town was being eroded slowly, but subject to a catastrophic disaster that would not sell well as a movie. Really, it would be the slowest disaster flick ever made.

The village was unnerved by the sounds. Though always subjected to the sounds of crumbling icebergs floating south via the warm currents, every new crackle from the glacier sounded like dynamite. Already living in the month of daylight, the noise disrupted their sleep further. Eventually they began to hear cracks in their sleep, having nightmares of an avalanche of ice to crush them in the glacier's master stroke as if it was an evil villain.

Iluak, an Inuit, and his family were the only ones in town that seemed unconcerned. When asked how they kept so calm, they gave two responses: "We're a nomadic people, when we can no longer live in a place, we move on," and also, "The glacier is described by our people as a spiritual road. Though there is great danger involved, like falling into a frozen hell, to be slowly crushed as the ice moves, but at the end, at the source of moving ice, there is said to be a place of great spiritual power." When asked if he would ever attempt such a journey he said, "Hell no. We

leave that sort of thing for spiritual men.”

Gordon meanwhile, began to actually converse with the glacier. Granted the conversation was one-sided and questioning. He would sit in his dining room on a stool and patiently ask the glacier why it was experiencing feelings of aggression, why was it not satisfied with its current condition, what the glacier dreamt about. He imagined that the glacier dreamed of being an iceberg, free to wander the arctic seas. Gordon said, “but that would be a death wish! You would roam free but invariably either melt in the warm seas of the south, or become trapped again in the icy wastes of the pole.” Perhaps freedom for just a short period of time is better than no freedom at all.

John just kept measuring, measuring, measuring.

In August, Henry was gone for a full week. The village was beginning to worry that he was dead, when they spotted him climbing back down along the glacier. They met him as he reached the edge, and though he looked emaciated, he grinned broadly. “Where have you been?” they asked. He said he had found the source. “And what was there?” they asked. He gave them a smile that suggested the throes of passion with a lover, said nothing, and returned to his small government shack.

When winter came the Roberts moved into one of the trawlers, except Gordon who stayed and built fires out of the wood from his crumbling house. He would spend his days staring into the ice that grew clear and melted from the heat of his fire. He saw a dark object deep in the ice that seemed to grow clearer every day.

The winter months were long as always. The townspeople huddled in down and furs, and the adults made love to stay warm, and the children cuddled with their malamutes and huskies.

In the thaw of spring, they could feel it in the air that something was about to

give. Gordon's dark object kept coming closer, John's measurements became more erratic, and Henry's passions more obscure.

Over the course of the summer months the glacier advanced. John shrieked as day by day the wall of ice was one foot from his house, then one inch, then into his bedroom, the unwanted guest taking the master suite. The houses closer to the water made room for the new refugees. Over the years small attempts were made to keep the village together. A few more houses were built, but over time the town became deserted, until it seemed the only ones who wished to stay were Gordon and Michael, Gordon claiming that the Glacier had become a great friend.

They moved as an exodus, rebuilding their lives, their homesteads on the last true wilderness of the frontier. Though it is a hard living, if there is one thing in Alaska it is space: space for new dreams, though most of the village did decide to move a little South.

Only Henry remained, ever studying and falling in love with the glacier as it poured into the bay, large chunks breaking off into the ocean, becoming icebergs, calving it's called, as though the icebergs were their children. Eventually, due to a lack of supplies, Henry was forced to evacuate, but he vowed to return, saying he has never met a more "beautiful and dynamic natural catastrophe."

The people of Ivonof Bay carried out small vengeance. They bought fuel inefficient cars, used aerosol spray, and burned their garbage. They stood stalwart at their new homes, their new citadel against the arms of nature.

Vespers

Bill learned that his wife had left him when half his books were gone from the bookshelf (the first editions), and then, he realized later, half his furniture as well. In the refrigerator was rotting food. The dog was gone. He removed his glasses, wiped them with his shirt, and upon returning them to his face found nothing had changed. Had he been asleep weeks? he wondered.

He called his friend Gordon. "What day is it?" he asked.

"Monday."

"No, what's the date, give me something relative I'd know."

"It's a week past the day John Lennon died. Where have you been this past week?"

"In a monastery in Berkeley."

"Ah," he said, "Did you know Anna left you?"

"I've been figuring that out."

In the bedroom, the Victorian style queen was gone, but, out of a sense of humor perhaps, she had left him a cot, and his small wooden desk remained, which overlooked the back yard and the oak that was slowly rooting its way into the cellar.

"Well, did you see it coming?" Gordon asked.

"I guess not," he said.

They had been together for five years. It had taken on a degree of permanence. At the time he married he was an unpublished author, working as a copy editor for a small press. Then his first novel, finished when he was 30, attracted some attention from the publishing houses, and with the advance he was able to put a down payment on his house in east Oakland. It wasn't an ideal neighborhood, but the house

was comfortable for a couple without a family, and just right around the corner was a Tibetan restaurant run by exiled monks.

By the time Gordon arrived, Bill had dug out a five year old pack of unfiltered Lucky Strikes, and was chasing the foul tasting smoke with scotch and tonic.

“Jesus, it's as cold in here as it is out there,” he said.

Bill realized he hadn't taken off his brown leather jacket and wool cap. “Oh, yeah, I guess it is.”

Bill walked to the bedroom with Gordon following after him. He sat on the cot with his typed manuscript beside him.

“You still using this dinosaur?” Gordon asked, referring to Bill's electric typewriter. “Is that your manuscript?”

“Yes” he said, “I've been searching for signs I may have forgotten.”

“What were you working on?”

“A novel about a stable relationship.”

“Right...” Gordon looked around the room. “And we see now where that ended up. So you're searching for signs about it failing?”

“Exactly.”

Gordon sat on the flimsy wooden chair beside the desk.

“So where is she?” Bill asked.

“Veronica thinks she went to Minnesota.”

“What on earth is she doing there?”

“Umm... well I heard it was law school.”

“What?” Bill was genuinely confused.

“Yeah.”

“How do you know this?”

“Through Veronica.” Veronica, Gordon's wife, had worked with Anna at the same law firm. “Did you know she was applying?”

“No,” Bill said.

“Yeah, nor did we.”

He looked mournfully at his manuscript, an attempt at honest realism capturing a happy marriage. He wondered if her leaving lay somewhere in the subtext. If not, it was clearly filled with some egregious holes, whole pieces of the story he was not privy to.

“What are you going to do?”

“Start an investigation,” Bill said.

He scoured the house for things left behind as Gordon sifted through the fridge to pick out the still edible products. He tested the eggs for rottenness in a glass of water.

Bill, meanwhile, used tweezers, delicately approaching each forgotten item, but it wasn't much. She had shown the care of a murderer. There was an earring behind the sofa, a grocery list written in her handwriting, three pieces of junk mail with her name on it, and, the mother load, an unopened financial aid letter, rejecting her application for funding.

As they ate a hobbled together omelet, which tasted off, and drank coffee black, since the cream had congealed, they laid out the items in front of them, which Bill numbered as exhibits.

“So where would she get the money?” Gordon asked.

“I don't know, we don't have anything saved up, really.”

At midnight Gordon got ready to leave, “Are you alright?”

Bill thought about it. He said, “I'm not sure.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’ve been distanced from myself.”

“You should quit Catholicism and take up marijuana. You get stranger things from being in your monasteries than any drug.”

“Maybe,” Bill replied.

His love for Catholicism had emerged out of his youthful enthusiasm for Buddhism. He had come eventually to the conclusion that it would be impossible for a westerner to fully grasp the religion. Thus he fell in love with the Catholic ritual, the earnestness of the soup kitchen, the minor debates over points of theology and scripture. It was thus that he was introduced to the Franciscans who lived in Berkeley. The monastery was really just a well-kept house, in which lived four aging monks. There he was frequently welcomed as a guest, joining them in their repast, spending the evening in contemplation, and in the early dawn, embracing the natural beauty of God's creation.

It was Gordon who first introduced the now estranged couple. With Bill being alone for so long, he had taken it upon himself to set them up on a blind date. Bill was not a social animal, but over the course of the night, and several bottles of high priced wine, she found a way to pry into the shell of sometimes pseudo-intellectualism he built around himself.

He had written about her, in his veiled fiction: I noticed her personality was fluid. With me she was serious, we'd talk about underwater turbines at Deception Pass. Though she'd be wearing a summer dress, and would smile when she saw a bird she knew the name of. I noticed when she came home from her other group of friends, the ones I rarely saw that she would be drunk and giddy, referring to pop culture and politics, which I rarely ever heard at home. This passage yielded a great

deal for him. He had forgotten that she had always lived a double life, if a conventional one. She was a different person with him than she was with others.

Unlike Anna, Bill never took photographs, never looked at photographs. He was bored by them, especially those of the sentimental kind, poorly composed, and they didn't capture the feeling of the moment anyway. Memory was something better suited for writing. As a result, Bill noticed his house was completely absent of images of Anna. He searched through his papers, his one photo album, but there was nothing there. Whatever photographs there were of her, had been taken with her. He called his friend, an artist, "Quick," he said, "I need a favor."

They settled on a price, two hundred, plus a bottle of high quality whiskey.

The artist came to his house. He described the project. "Okay," the artist said, "Like a police profile."

They put together a composite sketch with the smallest details evaluated, "The eyes a little farther apart," he said. "The mole a little more to the left." They went through color swatches of her hair and skin. They went through her waist and bust sizes. They went through a Nordstrom's catalog, to point out something she'd typically wear.

The artist said, "Okay, I'll have it for you in a couple weeks."

The only one who called the house was Gordon, often with small tidbits of information concerning his inquiries. "Okay, I have a detail," Gordon said, "My wife didn't want me to tell you."

"Why not?"

"Because she thinks you're dealing with this in an unhealthy way."

"How so?"

He paused... "She thinks you're too detached."

“Well, what is it?”

“A lawyer left the law firm where Veronica works.”

“So?”

“To accept a job in a Minneapolis law firm.”

“Ah,” he said.

His investigation took him to the internet, which plodded along on his aging computer. The law firm of Russo and Drake was welcoming a new associate attorney by the name of Thomas Carson from San Francisco.

He read the most recent pages of his manuscript, and found that he noticed a continued detachment. He read to himself a story of mediation. Bill, still working with, as Gordon put it, stone age technology, refused to update his computer, get a smart phone, or engage in any sort of online life. Anna, however, was tech driven. She had an e-reader, maintained a blog, texted, and even on occasion smoked an e-cigarette, which Bill failed to even conceptualize. Bill, noticing this perhaps subconsciously, had written of the troubles of being married to a younger woman, especially on the cusp of this rapidly advancing technology. It pervaded in the last few pages of his manuscript, in the form of an increasing loneliness, a feeling as though her character's attention was constantly being diverted, as though dam might divert water, also providing a cement wall against the natural spawning of information.

The subtext he had thought absent, in fact lurked beneath the pages, indicating some lurking horror beneath pastoral scenes. He had written:

Grilling in the dark in the suburbs. The power is out and it isn't a breaker. Overcast so there's not a star in the sky. She pours liquid flames, casting our shadows on the lawn. God-fire in truth is only kerosene. She smiles at me, slapping the steaks down

too early, so they'll taste like chemicals. She is wearing a baby blue dress, her eyes now turned back down to the grill. Flashlights from the children swing wildly in the dark. One of them gets caught like a fugitive, between the beam of light and the unpainted fence. Grandma sits in a lawn chair wearing dark glasses and sipping on gin and lemonade. Sometimes it feels as though its slipping.

When I was young, we would stay on a boat in the summer, docked at a small island. There were trails through forest and fields of tall grass. I walked on this trail I'd never seen before, between two others. It cut through tall grass, and the dog strained against the leash. The air buzzed with insects. Then all at once it was over and I never walked the trail again.

Then there was the time I was at this cabin on a binge alone without light. I had walked up and down the stairs countless times. As I rounded the corner, though, the stairs were gone, and there was a hallway with what looked like Roman archways extending into the dark. Years later, I visited a house that I had lived in until the age of two, and the basement was filled with plaster arches.

Through the sizzle is the sound of waves: the ocean like a theatrical backdrop behind her. The children run with the light flashing against the fence, like a flipbook. Sometimes a place is intruded by another. The door to the house opens.

He wrote in the margins here: his past had been intruded upon. It was a violation in progress and he had felt echoes moving backward. He remembered that he wrote this around the same time as Anna went on a company retreat to Monterey.

He called Gordon to test his latest theory.

Anna went on the retreat. She cheated on him with this Thomas, a powerful articulate attorney. She returned thinking she could shrug it off, never giving a direct explanation, but she felt incredibly guilty, constantly reliving her indiscretion in her

head. A growing feeling of disconnect followed. Thomas, on the other hand, was in love with his legal secretary, and thus constantly reminded her of her guilt. Rather than deal with the event, by reveal and subsequent fallout, she thought the most reasonable move was to leave Bill and leave town. Unable to pay for law school herself, Thomas would pay her way, thus they could live, presumably, as high powered, young attorneys together.

“Well, there's a big problem in your theory there, Bill.”

“What?”

“In order to be accepted into that law school she would have had to have applied in spring.”

It was true, it was a glaring flaw. He had written himself into a hole. Did that then mean that this was a long planned exodus, a fervent desire for an opportunity of escape? He was rewriting the novel with alternating perspectives, envisioning her as the keeper of a secret for the last long months and when they discussed their future together (which they often did) she would put on the guise of enthusiasm, to cover her true motives.

The portrait arrived weeks later, dropped off in brown wrapping paper. He placed it on the mantle of his fireplace, still unwrapped. He had unintentionally become a recluse, his hair was shaggy, his face unshaven, his fingernails were long. He spent most of his time between his desk and his cot, on occasion venturing out only for food, scotch, and Sunday mass. The more he wrote the more confused he became. He couldn't get inside her head, he couldn't understand what was going through her mind.

When Veronica stopped by Bill answered the door reflexively and ushered her in. She wore dark sunglasses, and a red coat.

“How are you doing, Bill?”

He shrugged and said, “Well, I’m doing just fine.”

“Gordon asked me to check up on you.” His house was clean but still barren, not making any attempt to replace those items missing. She slipped off her shoes and sat in a lawn chair in his living room, her bare feet against the cold wooden floor. “It’s chilly in here,” she said, “How do you live like this?”

“There are only certain needs we have,” he said, “We can survive with minimal heat, beans, and rice. I’ve been trying to pare things down.” She stared at the package on the mantel as though about to ask, but then seemed to think better of it.

“Can I offer you something to drink?” he said.

“Sure,”

“I have scotch or water, or perhaps both?” She nodded, which he assumed meant both.

They engaged in minimal small talk. Bill never responded to it well, he would answer curtly and stare into space as though dwelling on other topics.

After she finished her drink she suggested they go to his back yard for a smoke. The light outside was pale. The oak tree had lost most of its leaves, which lay dry in the unkempt yard crackling under foot. “These will rot, you know. Come winter, I mean.” She turned to him abruptly. “Are you really doing okay Bill?”

“Yes,” he said, “Sure I am.”

“I mean, you’ve always been detached, but,” gesturing broadly with her hands, “Surely this is some symptom right?”

“Let them rot. It’s natural after all.”

“I don’t mean the leaves.”

“I’m working,” he said.

She gave him a heavy look, “Working on what?”

“You know, the novel.”

She seemed exhausted. She let the butt of her cigarette fall to the ground, which Bill promptly stooped to pick up. He placed it in a ceramic ashtray by the door, with only two other butts marring the clean spiral design.

As he was about to let her out the door, she said to him, “I know Gordon told you about the guy at the law firm. It was just speculation, Bill, we were just gossiping you know, with the abrupt move of both of them seeming so close. I got a letter from her, though.”

Bill was taken aback. “Really?” he said.

“Yeah, but it wasn't from Minnesota. It turns out she didn't go. She didn't have the money for it. She's back in Seattle, staying with her parents,” she eyed him closely, and tugged on his jacket. “If you want to know my opinion, I think the lawyer thing was just gossip. I think she applied to law school and was too afraid to tell you.”

“Why?”

“You bought this house, Bill. Maybe she was afraid you'd be mad. Maybe the desire to go made her question settling down with you. But maybe they're not even related. Who knows? I just thought you'd like to know that probably that whole lawyer thing, just us gossiping. That's why I told Gordon not to tell you.”

She walked down the steps and got in her car and he waved her off.

Something clicked in him. He had been trying to write her into a corner, collapse the event into a single moment in order to understand. The real question in any mystery is not the act of the crime itself, but the motivations. Here the crime was absent, leaving only the motivations to put together, which doesn't leave quantifiable

traces. She was *not* in law school. She *probably* did not have an affair. This was not *necessarily* planned. The fact that he couldn't write her perspective in a satisfactory way was a sign. The only thing left to investigate were his own motives, which he had conspicuously left aside. Perhaps it was not that he missed signs of decline, but perhaps by his nature he was unable to perceive them.

It had been three months after she left that the phone rang in the middle of the night. He got up slowly groping for his glasses in the dark. He took his comforter with him, dragging it across his hardwood floor as he shuffled into the living room. He looked at the number on the caller ID. His blurry vision caused him to rub his eyes and look closer. It was a Seattle number. He hesitated over the phone, but didn't answer. The phone didn't ring again. He woke up thinking the phone call was a dream. If it *did* happen, however, he was taking part in blocking his own investigation. He contemplated arresting himself for obstruction of justice.

He began to forget things. He forgot appointments, dates. He forgot the passage of time. His bills lapsed. When the lights were shut off it didn't fully register. He never used the heat, and rarely used the lights anyway, growing accustomed to long hours of sleep in the lack of winter light, and writing only when daylight filtered through his yellowing window. Only the mortgage payments were made, directly from his bank, silently whittling away his meager funds. Gordon and Veronica stopped checking in, the house was probably dark every time they would drive by. Perhaps they were thinking Bill had gone away or maybe they just considered him a lost cause, too distant, too untethered, to be brought back to life.

Bill sat on his bed in the dark and smoked. He felt transplanted, as though he was a character from a 20th century novel placed in a 13th century monastery, studying scripture by candlelight. He thought of his room as a cell. His evening scotch as

vespers. His novel as a long held mantra. His investigation of Anna, as a monk might seek out God, lurking in the words, to be teased out with subtlety of interpretation. But really, a god only found through faith, like a decaying memory, longing to be refreshed. He looked out his window and didn't see the twisted oak, but terraces of vineyards, to be crushed for wine, then distilled for brandy.

A Body Always, Already

She is plugged into political hip-hop, the peeling paint on her walls, the layer of clothes, dishes, and trash adding warmth to the cold wood floor. She is also plugged into the sound of the rhythmically creaking bed in tandem to the deep guttural pulse of runoff and... the familiar smell of weed smoke, wafting inescapably as she attempts a manual override, her phone hopefully acting the switch. She says, "Bryon... Bryon. I got to get out of here."

He's quiet on the line but says, "Sure."

Ariel walks an hour in the rain, down a road with no sidewalks, cars consistently hazed and splashing a great deal until she reaches Bryon's apartment, a small second story flat on the edge of Whatcom Falls. He lets her in and they sit on his porch together smoking poorly rolled Top tobacco, and drinking coffee porters, both smells blending well with the damp earth, the sound of the river.

"So what's going on?" he asks.

And she's unsure of how to respond... aware at this point that it might be an element of paranoia, that her roommates are really just guilty of the usual roommate behavior, being somewhat dickish and inconsiderate. But she can't shake this feeling that there's something else involved, some other component misaligned, ripe for serious malfunction. Yet maybe it's in the Ouspensky group, that the problem point is lurking there, and if only she just had another set of eyes on it, Bryon's eyes maybe, everything could be fixed in a more... concrete manner.

So the next day Bryon comes with her. The rain hasn't let up. The house, being used as the impromptu church of the "Fourth Way", is still under renovation. This particular night the church is geared up for a culmination of certain preparations,

a confirmation of the new class of spiritual participants.

She had first run across Tristan, the de facto leader, as part of a more general search for a healing path. At the time, she had been considering music as something to get the body in tune, the brain automatically adjusting due to resonance, the right thinking patterns as a matter of listening to the appropriate sounds. Tristan had been there to guide her but also to suggest a more holistic approach, that it wasn't a matter of just the right sounds, but instead, reworking the entire collection of senses and interior processes, to think of the body as a complex machine that only had to be tuned correctly.

Now, in this house, Tristan is in the dim lighting, an incredibly tall and skinny man, talking amongst the members and employing minute movements while speaking, his spine a constant, rigid poll. Ariel is plugged into the dingy oriental carpet from her bare feet, the burbling brook of quiet spiritual talk, Bryon's own anxiety, hanging back she sees, peering at a charcoal drawing of a raccoon. She is plugged into the bare white bulbs, Tristan's infectious calm, and an internal signal indicating something deeply amiss, as vague as a "check engine" light.

Tristan stands on a raised section of floor holding a construction lantern like a microphone. "We are misaligned," he says, "We are misaligned due to the constant bombardment of sick sounds, deranged images, and perverse sensations. Each creating the separate I, a disparate removed I. We are a collection of a plurality of Is, never a whole self." He is looking directly at Ariel. "With the advent of quantum mechanics, and parallel universe theory, the multiple Is are not just a theory. What if we could chose consciously which of those Is we wished to inhabit? Or even, perhaps more extremely, which of those Is we wished to have been our past?"

Behind her Bryon snorts rather loudly, she feels a blush of embarrassment, but

is unsure of the cause. Is it his skepticism or Tristan's beliefs? Nevertheless that's what he'd be playing off of tonight, attempting to correct certain past inputs via “quantum tunneling.”

After the speech is over, and the murmur of quiet agreements resumes she hears Bryon mutter under his breath, “Why is it that New Agers perpetually feel the need to appropriate science for their own purposes?”

Ariel says, “They aren't New Agers really,” but she's faltering a bit, “it's based off Ouspensky... a student of Gurdjieff.”

“Ah...” he says, “I remember Gurdjieff. He was a meditation guru right, and there's a dancing institute in Seattle?”

“Yeah... yeah,” but it was breaking down before her. Was this right? Gurdjieff, dancing? But this is what she brought him here for right? To provide some perspective?

Tristan approaches them, with his hazy eyes. He's someone that doesn't appear to be a natural leader, more comfortable letting the waves of inputs wash over him.

“Welcome,” he says, “To this our garden....” yet its a jovial tone, its not a sacrosanct garden after all, “Of forking paths.”

Bryon looks surprised, “Borges?” he asks.

Tristan smiles and says, “Yes. I take it you know the story.”

And they go off on their own tangential talk discussing his plethora of fiction, and Tristan explains, he likes the story as a metaphor for what his work is here. For a moment Ariel's calmed, this bit of common ground joining two worlds together.

In a lull, Ariel asks, “When will you be starting the sessions?”

“Ah, yes, soon. May I ask,” Tristan says, looking at Bryon, “if you'll be doing some healing with me.”

Bryon says “Ahhh....”

“Reservations are okay,” he says, “We work with what works, you know. I’ll tell you the waves of bliss will get you higher than any drug.”

“Umm,” Bryon says scratching his head, “If you say so.”

“When I first started practicing meditation, years ago, I wore my beard and hair long like you. The first time I meditated for a solid two hours it was unbelievable. I felt like I was on acid.”

“Right,” he says, “I’ve never done more than the occasional joint myself.”

“Oh.” Tristan’s head is askance. “Well there’s nothing to fear here, only unlocking what’s already inside you.”

And then Tristan walks off circulating amongst the others. She’s left alone with Bryon who says, “But that’s not exactly comforting right? The brain can do some potent things.”

When Tristan disappears from the room it means that the sessions are about to take place. This sort of projection of energy requires a quiet space, away from prying eyes so he’s in his black box, a sort of meditation room in the center of the house. She had always been unsure of what the room was originally intended to be. It was a small space, had only one door, and was located in the direct center of the house, without any windows. One at a time they each enter and they each come out.

She’s in the black box with Tristan. He sits in a lotus (the pole of his spine retained) with a dim electric lamp in front of him.

“When I first figured out how to project this way, to move back in a significant fashion, it was startling, revelatory.”

She waits for him to continue.

“The way we think of time is flawed at best. The countless branches that we

see are not hierarchical. They are not a tree, there is no first instant, but instead every instant is interconnected. We are simultaneously every-where as every-when.”

He opens his eyes and looks at her. “I’ve thought about you. When Ouspensky was writing he was writing directly about you and no other. Okay, so take me back to where you want to go, I’ll follow you and we can get the one true timeline, the whole self, back on track. We’ll retrieve you where we lost you.” As if the black box could fall away, reveal the secret behind the crash while remaining intact and inscrutable.

In another time she is young and her name is Jean. She is in the living room, her hair recently cut short, playing a piece of music that is its own inscrutable black box, one her father likes, a Schoenberg piece, devoid of a place of reference, the tonal center. She prefers Chopin, but he seems to like it so much when she plays the twelve-tone, or the serial compositions, or even Bach, a piece in which the math figures as the most prominent aspect. And somehow, even through the atonality, if she places a note incorrectly, he’ll notice and correct her with a pitch perfect hum. The piano, itself, is a perfect instrument, one that he insists on tuning himself, every other month, not believing in the integrity of the professionals.

Perhaps there is something about the play between chaos and order, intense dissonance, which allows him to entertain numbers in his head more easily. He listens as he works, crunching the appropriate numbers to eventually be put into practice, organizing machines to fly, always room for improvement to eek out a little more lift, a more efficient design. Twelve-tone is certainly nothing if not efficient, no stray note left unaccounted for. These are his moments of piece with her. As much as the piano is a way to extend the self, so is the player used by the piano to achieve its potential.

His life is now thoroughly *routinized*, something that had not been possible

when Marie had been alive: a pointed bit of chaos, that woman, an excess of emotion and alcohol, the contradiction constant that corrective measures could be taken, but she refused to partake in them. When she had been medicated, or, at least, in the in between phases, their lives had been filled with luster. They would picnic in the arboretum with their daughter on the rare sunny day, take weekends to visit her family in Stehekan, where often she'd take her daughter in the truly down days when she began to view him as a stifling monster. He'd received photographs of them in the orchards, a vindictive gesture, until the tides turned again, and she'd be back in the house, smiles and apologies, bringing back crates of apples, making cider and pies, living out this dream of the modern family in their Victorian house.

Now that dream had been limited, but that was never where he had put his focus. The daughter was something *she* had wanted. Which is not to say he doesn't love his daughter, of course he does, but he doesn't know quite how to place her, how to keep her running smoothly. When she finishes her piano she walks up to her bedroom, to read for the next day. He goes for his usual evening walk, to clear his head and smoke a cigarette. The house is perched on the edge of the arboretum, its sprawling 230 acres giving the illusion of wilderness in the middle of the city. What seems so wholesome in the day seems so lewd and vulgar in the night. Rose gardens transform into underage drinking, stone statues become markers for drug deals, glistening dew on spider webs emerge as discarded condoms from illicit trysts.

When home he drinks a glass of milk and reads from a water damaged volume of Oxford Classics, which he had discovered long buried in the garage. He is the ticking of the clock on the mantle, the ripples in the milk, the elegant words on the page. He barely registers the creaking stairs and the figure in the darkness.

“Papa?”

There are tears streaming down her face. She comes and sits on the couch beside him sobbing uncontrollably. He knows where this pain must come from, but at the same time he is powerless. He sets down his book and leans toward her, but is unable to do any more.

“What's the matter?” he asks, stupidly, knowing exactly what.

And she, on her part, knows exactly what it is she is unable to express. Instead it's a confused mess of incomplete sentences, half-remembered moments, emotions expressed as physical embodiments: choking, nausea, pain, an oppressive fog preventing any thought from taking shape. She had been her mother's daughter, almost an extension of her. They were in tune, synchronized, and she felt acutely her mother's despair or her mother's joy. Being wrenched from her, she was without herself.

Then she is standing outside of her Catholic school. The road in and out, broken over years of rain, moss intermingling among the asphalt. It is raining now, causing water to drip over her brow, soaking her uniform and backpack. Most of the other kids have been picked up by now. It's just her standing in the cold and Jonathon, this strange little boy. A lonely spirit, like herself, both creating their own walls against the tide of young Catholic faces.

And over the weeks they've made a certain bond, fleeing to the space behind the chapel, the former priest's quarters, to talk in secret, to share their misery. He goes out at night. He buys cigarettes and wanders the city. Though everyone else in the school are cookie-cutter Christians, he is different, craving some meaning beyond God and grades.

When her father pulls up in the aging Mercedes it's a tension of silence, and meaningful looks are exchanged. She looks out the window away from him, fingers

touching the drops of moisture on the inside of the window. He's listening to the car purr, actually plugged into the engine, the car not only the extension of himself, but he, the extension of the car, the necessary component to give the vehicle intelligence to operate. She on the other hand, as he looks at her, is disconnected, not even arranging her sight in a meaningful way.

“Where are we?” he asks her.

She sighs and says, “I don't know Papa.”

“Don't you recognize these streets, we've driven them countless times, what direction's home from here?”

She shrugs and continues to stare vacantly, the scenery, to her, apparently a static background, not recognizing the grids and maps, the signs and lights, steadily at work.

The evening plays out in it's usual fashion. This evening a Partita by Pärt, a haunting piece fitting the gray evening and she goes to bed perhaps earlier than usual. He finds sleep coming uneasily, and he walks the arboretum later than usual. He moves in the direction of the 520 bridge, standing near the overpass, and the abandoned one, on which there are miscreants as usual. He sees a large group gathered underneath, circling around an object, clearly a keg, holding plastic cups and smoking cigarettes. He toys with calling the police, but they will be there soon anyway. They never last long these things. One of the teenagers seems to see him, getting a glance of concern. But he only waves, let them think they're safe, why not? He may even be seen as a kindred spirit, smoking silently in the dark and drizzle.

He makes his way back home and notices something that seems not right, the window by the chimney open, a light on in Jean's room, silhouettes cast on the wall.

He reacts instinctively, always knowing that there would someday be an

intruder, the corruption of the outside being so close in proximity. He goes into his office, unlocks his filing cabinet to retrieve the Colt Detective Special, deftly loading and cocking the gun. He moves upstairs silently, so familiar with the steps as to make them noiseless. The door to his daughter's room is closed tight. He twists the doorknob and pushes it open.

It's the degradation of the arboretum come inside, entering even this small outpost, and yet...

"Papa!" she screams, her eyes widening. The boy leaps off of her, panicked. He's staring at the barrel of the gun, poised before the window.

Recognition slowly comes to him. The boy is just a boy, an infiltrator who was invited in. She pulls up the sheet to cover herself. He just stands there blinking, not really sure of an appropriate reaction, never yet having had to play the protective father.

"Go," he says to him, "leave the way you came."

The boy clambers out the window, and down the vines along the chimney. He closes the window after him.

"Do I smell... cigarettes?" he looks at an empty beer bottle sitting beside her bed. He wonders to himself how he could be so blind, that he could allow this to go on in his home. How many nights had this occurred?

"I don't want this for you," he says, "This kind of life. I don't want you to be your mother."

He sits beside her on the bed. He sets the safety, and places the gun down on her desk. He hands her the shirt discarded on the floor, "Here, please, put this on."

She does so as he averts his eyes.

"You shouldn't see him," he says. He pauses, testing out words in his mouth

before they are said, “Perhaps...” he says, “Perhaps you should have been a boy.”

Why did he say that? Because it was true he supposes.

He picks up the weapon and leaves, closing the door behind him. He feels anger, but more than anything, a project coming on, to stamp out any semblance of the mother, any weakness that might be present in her. He wants her to be virile, to fly into the world potently.

He remembered when he had first attempted to tune a piano, his old weathered upright, he figured that, since perfect fifths were easy to tune, he would simply tune the piano in a chain of fifths, cycling up to the top and then repeat until every note had been tuned. Unfortunately, when he attempted to play it, he discovered it sounded worse than before. He had discovered by accident, what was already apparent to people knowledgeable about music, which is that there is an inherent error, that the system is off from that perfect ratio by an almost infinitesimal amount. It was as though this is what he had done with Marie; one can't fix a broken thing with a system that ignores the error.

What allows a piano to exist, to be tuned resonantly, is to spread the imperfection thin, so that the smallest amount of dissonance remained. Was this then the right way? To spread Jean thin? To attempt to erase the error through constant minute tunings?

The next day attempts to erase the events of the evening, but they persist as a sour taste. The piano is played as usual, Schoenberg again and she is without tonal center. To her now, this dissonance is a cry of anguish, an anguish, like the music, that will never resolve into assonance. She only wants some physical touch, some reminder that there is love and life worth living outside of the clockwork dream of her father.

So the black box is a record then, which reveals structural problems in addition to pilot error. She has to get out of the box, get away from this mechanical man before her. She flees the room as Tristan opens his eyes and calls after her “Wait...”

She's seeking out Bryon and he's not in the living room, he's not in the kitchen. Her vision is swimming and she can't help but feel something (someone) has come back with her. But this is why she brought Bryon, as a confirmation, or a handle if things seemed to go awry.

She climbs the stairs with difficulty, her whole body is rocking as if on a boat or drunk. Then she has made it up the stairs and she's plugged into furniture covered in sheets, Bryon's calm as he drinks green tea, and the sound of scratching against wood.

“This is an odd house...” he says.

“Bryon.”

“There isn't a bathroom for one.”

He turns his head, framed by a dirty window behind him. He smiles at her.

“I think there's an animal in the walls,” he says. He inches forward to a small door in the wall and sets his tea on a ledge.

“Bryon I'm...”

He puts a finger to his lips as if to shush her. “Don't scare it now.”

She tries to tell him once more, but no words come out, she leans against the bare dusty wall. The situation seems to be branching out rapidly. The raccoon in the walls is leaping out, or Bryon is noticing that something's wrong, or Tristan's coming up the stairs behind her to retrieve her, or she just falls crumpled like a doll on the floor. They can't all be occurring at once and, lastly, she's plugged into Bryon diving at her, the tea knocked from the ledge, the two falling objects hitting the floor

simultaneously.

She is restructuring herself, having briefly dissipated. There are four faces looking into hers. Tristan says, “This is... it's just a side effect of the healing work, part of the very real possibility of lag...”

“Oh for God's sake,” Bryon says, “Come off it for one second.”

He's holding her wrist, taking her pulse, she guesses, which even she can feel is racing. There's a wetness running down her nose, the great throbbing in her head growing steadily.

“Bryon,” she says, “Bryon, I think there's something really really wrong.”

“Okay,” he says, “We're gonna get you out of here.”

Tristan says, “Wait, I'm not sure that's a good idea.”

Bryon just glares at him as he helps Ariel up off the floor. They get into his car and Bryon drives silently, steadily through the night. She is plugged into the tissue in her nose, the intense throbbing pain, the clunky growl of the engine.

“Where are we going?” she asks.

“We're going to the hospital.”

She says, “I don't know if I want to go.”

“You have to.”

She stares out the window piecing together the shadows of houses and trees behind this intense oppression on her eyes.

“I don't have insurance,” she says.

“Think about that later.”

She is terrified, she is seeing that gray bristled man in the darkness of the window as if he had been brought back with her, brought out of the black box.

“What happened in there...” she says, not really to him.

“In where?” he asks.

“In the black box.”

Bryon takes his eyes off the road for a moment, glances at her. “Nothing. I’d bet he doesn’t do anything, just let’s your mind fill it in.”

Her eyes go back to the dark window, the gray bristled man solidifying for her.

“Bryon...” she says, “my names not really Ariel.”

“What? What am I supposed to do with that?”

“I changed it... when I left.”

He looks at her again. But then she see's a strange look on his face, a glimmer of recognition, as if he sees the bristled face too that's emerging out of the nighttime glare, but the look is gone in an instant.

After a long purgatory in the waiting room, she's plugged into medical machines, diagnostics, and charts. The doctor's give a tentative diagnosis: intracranial pressure, “psuedotumor” they call it. It is as though her cognitive dissonance was a grain of sand, coated with layer upon layer to form the unwieldy pearl within her mind. Bryon's gone, left in the waiting room. Her father is heading north, to see his only daughter, Jean, who had vanished. She's plugged into the cold exhaustion of the ER doctors, she's plugged into a black box of memory, she's even plugged into her father, feels him roaring up the highway, he, himself, plugged into the road, the night, the engine.

Random Access

The latest subject entered Lily's office meekly. She had met him before, but only briefly. She gestured for him to sit in the large armchair in the center of the room. The space was plain, but they tried for a friendly atmosphere: a warm beige paint, tulips in a vase on the armchair, a token bust of Freud on the desk. It was not her typical workplace, nothing here that externalized her interior life, just tokens of what one might expect of a psychiatrist to offset the clinical feel of a research lab.

She smiled at him. "So, Mr. Orr. This will be your first session," she said, "We're going to talk for a while and then a nurse will administer the dose."

"And I can't be sure if it's the real thing?"

"No. I don't have access to that information, but through these trials we'll determine its effectiveness in a clinical setting. What do you understand about the drug?"

"That it affects your ability to remember."

"Right," she said, "But it affects memory in an interestingly specific way. Generally when you attempt to recall a situation or an event or even an image, we picture these things within the mind, but there are inhibitors which prevent these images from interfering with our sensory perception in the present. In dreams for instance, these inhibitors don't function, and that's why there's the other aspect of sleep that paralyzes the dreamer. Otherwise you begin to act out these dreams."

"Like a sleepwalker," he said.

"Right, exactly so."

When the drug had been in animal trials, she had been somewhat haunted by the images of their test animals: normally graceful cats clumsily falling off of tables

as in their memory the surface extended.

She said, “So this drug allows those memories to take over, so that you inhabit them. You're kind of dreaming awake. In reality it's a combination of three drugs: the drug that inhibits the inhibitors that prevent memory from appearing as reality and a paralytic that prevents you from then enacting those memories. The third is a stimulant, which allows the process to be focused. Otherwise, it seems, your memory runs in a kind of feedback loop, flashback within flashbacks.”

“Will that happen to me?”

“In some form, the double-blind also helps us evaluate if the stimulant is necessary, if that's the component that makes the subject respond to suggestion.”

Orr was not her typical patient. Most were PTSD patients or occasionally one dealing with childhood trauma. It was usually psychological reasons for memory loss and almost always representing a therapeutic need to recover the memory. In this case, a year prior he had been in a car accident with his wife. She had been killed and he had suffered from a dramatic head injury.

“For several weeks I was extremely disoriented or so they tell me. I can't remember an instant in which I felt back in my own head. It seemed to be gradual. I began to recognize events, places I knew, people that came to see me.”

She looked at the files before her, “You were suffering from a form of post-traumatic amnesia.”

“They told me my memory would recover after a time.”

“But it didn't,” she said.

“No.”

She gazed down again at her files. “It was found to be indeterminate if the cause was a form of brain damage or psychological trauma. Modern science seems to

suggest now, that the brain stores memory in a similar fashion as a computer. It comes down to a matter of data corruption.”

“So you think it could be physical then...” he said, “they told me if it was brain damage chances of recovering my memory would be unlikely.”

“Well,” she said, “The difference between hardware and software gets particularly indistinct when it comes to memory. We can sometimes access portions of the data, memories that weren't stored correctly for instance, or temporary files, memories that were never deleted, exceptions to the general rules of memory decay.”

“Could this drug help me then?”

“I'm not sure,” she said, “This kind of amnesia is relatively rare, we've had yet to do a trial with it. Where are your gaps?”

“With my wife. For a long time after the accident I could no longer recognize her, eventually I was able to remember snap shots. My children came back to me, eventually, maybe with them being, you know, still around they were able to jolt something, bring something back for me. In the accident it was like she was erased, you know? I lost not only her, but I lost the memory of her. I know I must have loved her. I see old photographs of us, you know, and I can feel like there's a glimmer, a brief bit of her that I try to get back.”

He was still mourning her, she wondered, how could he mourn her if he couldn't remember her? There was a photograph of the wife in his file. She studied it carefully. Is there more to a person than the physical traces left behind?

“Tell me something you remember about her. Some place you could potentially go into and, in a way, seek her out. Something closely linked with a physical space tends to be effective. Also, somewhat counter-intuitively, something from a long time ago. It's called Jost's law: memory, as it ages, gains a certain

redundancy in the mind.”

He told her about a time, when their children were still young, still relatively early in their marriage, that he had been at Canon Beach for Thanksgiving. He remembered playing with his children in the surf. He remembered arguing with his mother about the cooking temperature of a turkey. He remembered a sudden fear of losing his children in the morning fog. The sound of the surf at night, and the way a gnarled tree looked outside the second story bedroom. All he couldn't remember was her. Yet he knew from photographs that she was there. Like she was neatly cut away. Perhaps a strange reversal of a bad breakup, instead of her image cut from the family photo, her image remained and she was excised from the event instead.

The nurse came in. She administered the dose with an injection. Lily instructed him to close his eyes. The onset is fast, but never fast enough to outrun placebo.

“I think I can feel it,” he said.

He couldn't, she knew. As a precaution the paralytic kicked in first. She would know in under a minute whether it was indeed the placebo dose. It ticked down.

“Mr. Orr,” she said, “Can you hear me?”

In the placebo doses they might respond. Either realizing that they weren't truly on the drug, or, if they were particularly susceptible to hypnotic suggestion, might, in fact, believe they were entering their memory. But once they received the true dose they were able to tell the difference. Mr. Orr was silent. He had received something potent. She waited another minute, and then she began to tell him his story back to him, attempting to guide him back to Canon Beach, back to his memory, back to a place where he could seek out his wife, seek out his happiness.

The script she had crafted didn't take long to read. After all the story had been so fragmented. He was searching for the missing piece, and she couldn't really guide him any more than she had already done.

“You're on your own Mr. Orr,” she said.

She preferred the silence of this stage. There was something lovely about this side of psychiatry. The patient is quiet, completely in himself. Talk therapy was a chore, something that seemed to her as frequently frivolous. When patients were under, this was a quiet place. There was something unsettling, true, about his story. His craving for just the recollection of love, and here she was deliberately avoiding Bill, a man whom she still loved in a way. But the home was a disaster, and here at the clinic, there were but neurotransmitters, receptor sites, average durations and decay, and lovely points of data.

Orr was still fresh in her mind when she drove home that evening. The experience had shaken her. It had reminded her too much of the current state. Except it wasn't a problem of forgetting. She couldn't help but feel that she was an odd analog to Orr's wife. The memories Bill was retrieving were all of her younger self. She felt she was becoming that photograph, an image being perfected.

As she pulled into the garage on Friendly St, she noticed that the lights of her house were out. In the time just after sunset the house looked washed out. The light had transformed the white walls, the cheap carpeting, the lazy boy furniture, into a uniform gray substrate, which was then colonized by a lingering feeling that this place should be occupied, not empty and dark as it was, lifeless without the mess of children's toys, dirty dishes, and spilled formula. It should be a place where their lives overlapped creating a necessary disorder, instead of a constant disentangling into isolated pools of their selves.

The house was silent. She didn't bother to turn on the lights, but groped around in the darkness. She ascended the stairs quietly, as if a daughter coming home from an illicit rendezvous. The steps were too new to creak. The fan was on and spinning, the air felt canned, it had a prepared freshness. What would be comforting? Not this, but not quite the sterility of the office either, always smelling of anti-septic. She stood in the doorway and looked at him. He was quiet, in repose. He was so blatant now, as to do this in their bed, even knowing that she'd soon be home.

She took the headphones off him and attempted to wake him wanting to pull him out of his consistent and vivid fantasy. She wanted to pull him out of her own arms, the arms that were illusory, and pull him into her own, the arms that perhaps didn't have the taut skin of his remembered past, but were *real* flesh, it would physically release the dopamine in the act of touch. Or could the drug do that too? Could it trick the body into believing that what he was experiencing was real physical sensation?

She shook him steadily, splashed a small amount of water on his still face, yelled, "Bill, wake up! I'm here, I want you!" But he couldn't be roused. Medicine doesn't have the luxury of the endocrine system and has to be in it for the long term.

She watched his eyes, rolling wildly, as he would in REM. She leaned over him for a moment, his face now becoming leathery in age. Then methodically she undressed, brushed her teeth, took her sleeping pills, and put on her nightgown. She got another blanket, and arranged herself in the crook of his neck, her leg and arm holding close to his stiff body and waited for sleep.

Bill at this time was in Berkeley. Undoubtedly Berkeley had changed, but this was remembered Berkeley, static as though captured in a snapshot. Yes it was on

Telegraph Ave., he was sitting inside the Mediterranean Café, which, before public health concerns, smelled like tobacco and marijuana with an underlying note of roasted coffee bean. Sure it was after the bloom of the Sixties with Berkeley as a strange alternate political universe, but before he left at any rate, before it seemed to become so co-opted, before “Bukowski is behind the desk” or “Berkeley, the People’s Republic” had become fodder for t-shirt slogans and mean-spirited jokes. This particular warm afternoon he was not waiting for Lily, but for his first wife Anna. This was to be the afternoon they met via a mutual friend, and in preparation he sat chain smoking Lucky Strikes, pretending to read *The Brothers Karamazov*, trying to be so much the intellectual, seemingly trapped in a constant delayed adolescence. The novel curiously displayed only the first line that ended “which I shall describe in its proper place.” Evidently it had been where his eyes rested as he contemplated that mutual friend, who had only faded in his mind, evidenced by the way she appeared drab, skin lifeless, as Anna had grown only brighter, possessing a glow. He was ever documenting each detail of her body, modifying the tape, to make his memory of her more precise in its reliving.

In the early weeks that he had been using the drug, he primarily revisited his early life with Lily. Originally it seemed they had been so much in love. He had trapped himself within his house in Berkeley for five years after Anna had left and Lily was his psychiatrist. She coaxed him into the open, to emerge from a fog of scotch, sadness, and mountains of garbage. His house had become a hermitage, which he had filled with books and tobacco smoke. But the sessions worked, and he no longer needed to be her client. It was many months after their final session that they ran into each other on the street, and she casually asked him out on a date.

After several weeks of experimentation with the drug, the discovery that

guidance could be achieved with a tape, he started to go back further in his memory. It first came out of a desire just to catch a glimmer of her again. Then he sought to reopen the cold case, to understand why Anna left, a mystery he had never solved. Gradually, however, desire waned, in favor to capturing the most exquisite moments, the times of happiness with her that he had grown out of touch with. He was attempting to fix the memories in place, and in the process had become addicted to the past, every moment in the present, thinking only of his next return.

He was grateful, as always, when Anna arrived. He set down the book, put out his cigarette, and shook hands with Anna, immediately drawn to her presence, and in reliving, loaded with the knowledge of what would develop out of this meeting. She was young then, several years younger than him. She was hippie enough to fit into the Berkeley scene, but sensible enough to work at a law firm instead of a record store.

The reenactment of the memory came naturally, he felt all the right emotions, said all the right things, without questioning, without straining to find the words that seemed right in the moment. Perhaps oddly though, he knew that what he was living was a memory, which created a sort of strange distance, something he had not noticed at first, but had become more prominent each time he relived it. It was as though he had a dual consciousness, overlapping and meshing.

They hit it off immediately engaged by a mutual mean sense of humor, some degree of self-awareness, and a love of Tibet and Tibetan cuisine. As the evening went on they began to subtly hint to the friend that perhaps it was time for her to go, but she went on clueless, chiming in with useless anecdotes unaware that she was perhaps *interrupting*. Ultimately, she was inclined to return to her studies (the only one of them an actual student at Berkeley), and he was left alone with Anna. They

ended up at the last table in a Tibetan restaurant run by exiled monks.

She said at some point, "I never wanted what my parents wanted for me."

"And what's that?" he asked.

"It's nothing particular, nothing bad, that is. I never wanted mediocrity. I never wanted to go to college with the intention of finding a fiancée. See the way they figured, what I studied wasn't particularly important, it was who I met, the *connections* I made. Not just so I could find a husband, but to be a resource to him, another group of friends aside from his frat brothers to be clients, patrons, employers, or employees. So if there was no value in my actual knowledge what was the point, you know? Why not an arranged marriage or something."

"But you did graduate," he said.

"Yeah. A guy asked me to marry him too," she said.

"Really?"

"Uh huh. He was just this sweet little man. He was an audio geek, wanted to go into the stereo equipment business. His family had the funds to buy out his employer after he graduated. So of course that's what I liked about him, working at the stereo and record store, and we'd sit there after class and smoke pot and listen to music, which you know, at a Christian school seemed exotic enough."

"So what happened?"

"Ultimately he wanted the same thing. He wanted to get married and get a house with a big yard and have a dog and kids and he'd take care of me. You know, although he never said he wouldn't want me to work, it's kind of implied isn't it? That if he wanted kids I'd be the one to stay home with them."

"What do you want then?" he asked.

"I don't know. Something that seems not so mapped out. I want my value to

not depend on my looks, or my friends, or my fertility, or my family. But then I don't want my value to be in my work either. You know?"

"I think so," he said, "Value instead maybe in smaller things."

"Yeah."

When they left the restaurant darkness had descended, and the streets about them seemed deserted. They would get a bottle of wine from the corner store and walk back, she insisted, to *her* place. But then all of a sudden something went amiss. The memory didn't play out as it should. As they walked on the empty streets in the darkness, the streetlamps forming halos of insects in the warm night, she didn't do what she usually did. Something distracted Bill in the corner of his eye, a man standing on the grass, a small dog on a leash. It was not something he had seen before despite the countless times he had walked this same street at this same time. This was enough, it seemed, to lose her. She was no longer on the street with him. He called out her name into the darkness. And when he reached out (squinting with his ears he called it) to find a sign of her in the dark, he heard only the buzzing of antennas and transformers, the yapping of the dog. He tried to remember what should happen next.

They would go back to her place. They'd stay up all night drinking the wine, opening the cooking vermouth, any excuse to keep the night going. In a drunken show of romanticism he'd pick up a book of poetry off her bookshelf and read it aloud (in drunkenness you can take yourself a bit more seriously). They'd say they would stay up to see the sunrise and they settled into the couch and she grabbed his arm to wrap it around her. He'd fall asleep despite himself. He had still hoped for sex, but it wasn't going to happen. He'd wake up with her head on his shoulder, a perfect image he'd always linger on, with the fresh sunlight coming through the window and the record player skipping in the background. When she'd wake, she'd say to him, "For

some reason, you're making me really happy.” And he'd feel some wild joy that would extend long into the morning, not quite wanting to part ways, but ultimately forced to, both with respective jobs to return to, but filled with pleasant thoughts to sustain them through exhaustion.

But this failed to put his memory back on course. Instead he remained alone on the empty street. If anything the electric buzz became more insistent and his loneliness more intense. It reminded him of nights alone when he couldn't sleep, guessing that he should feel calm, but instead feeling nervous, anxious at the lack of any potential connection. Then he physically (?) walked through the dream space to reach her apartment, but found it locked and dark. It worried him. He had had dead time in the remembered city before, but it was always at the end of a given scene, a logical place to end a recollection. She had never just wandered off before, interrupting the night. It drew attention to the fact that she was just a representation, with no will of her own. Obviously she would have wanted to stay. But then... Good God, he thought. What if she did have a will, what if she left him here, before their relationship even started. A fantasy creation of his becoming sick of the fantasy.

The blackness in her apartment seemed unnatural. Peering in the window he couldn't make out the distinction of any object. It was like searching the edge of a videotape, that there might be something etched on the surface if only he could stress it further. He searched around the windows, until he found one slightly ajar. He lifted it further, using a garbage can to get up onto the ledge. But when he attempted to enter the apartment he suddenly found a great deal of resistance, and as he leaned forward, actual physical pain. His vision blurred, his hearing was pierced with a high-pitched whine. His legs moved as though waist deep in water. He fell forward into the dark room, tripping over the couch as he entered. He was falling in molasses, but

his face smacking hard against the wood floor anyway. He lay there staring at a wad of dust. And then felt himself sink.

When he woke, Lily was wrapped around him. Light was just entering the room in the moments before sunrise. He pondered her there, left to her own dream, kicking a leg like a puppy having a nightmare. He sighed. He gently moved her arm and sat up. The room, their bedroom was the only place where their personalities seemed to collide. There was the mess of his clothes, the bottle of pills, the tape recorder and headphone, all trying to be restrained, put into a sense of order. It was as though their possessions were at war with one another, the bedroom a battleground, the no mans land between her office and his.

He dressed. He walked downstairs into the kitchen. He put on a pot of coffee. The birds had yet to stir in the trees. The only sound was that of the machine, hissing and bubbling, producing the lingering smell of morning, which just by association would stir him into some form of wakefulness. That really was unappealing. A headache lingered, perhaps from trying to break into the dream apartment. He wondered if this was some sort of fail-safe put in place by either the drug or his psyche, in order to draw distinction between his true memories, and what would be solely confabulations.

He poured himself a cup of coffee and retreated back to bed. He placed himself back into Lily's arms, seeking the comfort of joining bodies that had been denied him in his memory. But then... it was almost as if he had spent the night with another woman, only to now return to his wife's bed.

Over the many weeks with Orr, she had built a repertoire of his memories in her notes designed to work on fixing her image in place, to solidify his memory of his

wife and their relationship. She thought, rather amusingly to herself, that she was working with a different kind of code. It was like attempting to recover corrupted text file on a hard drive by reading a paraphrase of the content aloud to the computer.

The doses had, of course, varied. The second session with him had been one of the placebo doses, to his great disappointment. The first dose had been such a success for him. He told her the story of how he walked out among the sand dunes to search her out. The fog had rolled in from the ocean, so thick that as the waves crashed on the beach it was difficult to tell where the waves would land. His shoes and pants became soaked as he walked along the beach. He saw an image in the fog, a woman, and he called out to her. She asked him where he'd been.

This moment struck Lily as so precious, delighted in the uncovering of a happy memory, as opposed to the repressed war maimings or childhood molestations that were her usual fare. Given the nature of the trial, progress was rocky. He did at one point receive the sans-stimulant mixture, which he described as most patients did, a whirl of memory, unable to really speak of the experience coherently. He indicated, however, that it was not unpleasant. Nevertheless, as she worked with him, he became markedly happier. He seemed, as well, physically transformed, no longer the meek anxious figure who came into her office on the first day, but a beaming, smiley little man, eager to talk and joke.

She said in a lighthearted manner, “which memory will we try today, Mr. Orr?” As though it was a flavor of pop at the soda fountain.

“I think I'll take Canon Beach again,” he said, mimicking her tone.

She cleared her throat, “Alright... is there anything in particular you'd like to explore.”

“Well... no, but it seems like the one that comes through most clearly.”

“That's probably due to the fact it's most frequently visited.”

Orr asked, “How far back can you go with this drug?”

“I'm not sure. In the trials we've only gone back as far as the age of eight or so.”

“Could you go back further, to birth even?”

“No,” she said, “That wouldn't be possible. The cognitive ability required to form memory only really starts around three or four, rarely earlier than two, and most memories from these memories are really confabulations, false memories that are constructed out of stories that are told to us, ingrained from a very early age.”

The nurse entered with the syringe in hand and they began the ritual, waiting as always, to see what kind of dose they had to deal with. With Orr firmly under, she delivered the script (now heavily marked with revisions and clarifications) and then the waiting, the measuring of vital signs.

As she reflected on Orr's transformation she wondered of Bill's own metamorphosis. She supposed he must be changing too, but in ways too subtle for her to be clear on. It seemed he always had one eye on the past, and when he gazed at her, or on the rare times he made love with her, he was only half present.

When the dose eventually wore off, she was sitting behind her desk, her own mind now dwelling in the past, dwelling with Bill. Orr came to, though groggy, and she allowed him some space to recover. They debriefed, and Lily, reduced to a dutiful scribe, took it all down, the newest instantiation of a great manuscript.

As Orr was always the last client of the day, and she walked him to the door of the clinic. As usual, one of his children was there to pick him up, but on this day, unusually, both of the children were present. After Orr opened, the son, a tall brown-haired man, perhaps in his late twenties, ducked out of the car and ran up the step to

where Lily stood.

“Excuse me doctor, can we speak with you for a moment?”

“Of course,” she said.

Both children stepped into her office leaving Orr in the car out front. The daughter sat down in the armchair, and the son stood over her, leaning slightly so that he rested his hands over her head.

“It's a pleasure to meet you both,” Lily said, “I've heard so many wonderful things about you. What can I do for you?”

“Well,” the son said, “It's a little odd. I mean, we're really appreciative about everything that you're doing for our father, and we know what the drug does and everything.”

“Sure,” she said, “Of course.”

“But, well,” he looked uncomfortable or, perhaps, pained. “When he started coming here. I mean he seemed really happy, since he seemed to be recovering some of his memory, right? Things seemed to be getting clearer. And then he told us how he had been specifically going over certain things. Like Canon Beach right?”

“Yes, we've talked about Canon Beach multiple times, it was one of the first point of entry for him.”

“Right. But he doesn't seem to be remembering it quite right.”

She let her false smile drop. “What do you mean?”

“I mean,” he said, “I mean. He goes on and on about how in love he was with her there. That they'd take long walks on the beach. That they 'd cooked the turkey together perfectly and dinner was this serene and wonderful experience with the whole family their, you know, us, our uncle and grandmother. Well it didn't happen like that. It wasn't really a happy memory. I mean, at the time, they were going

through counseling, our parents. He had had an affair, which he doesn't remember either. Our grandma, really, was the one that took care of us that week. Their bedroom was upstairs and we'd hear screaming matches. Really going at it intensely."

Lily had worried about this, especially in the possibility that brain damage had been the cause of the memory loss.

"What does this mean?" he asked. "Grandma's not around anymore, but we talked with our uncle and he confirmed it for us, our version of events."

"It might mean that his memories are false. It could be they're being created by stories. Stories that are told to him, photographs, the bits of external memory. Have you told him anything?"

The daughter spoke up. "No," she said, "We don't have the heart to."

"Good. Try not to let it show. It's probably nothing. It's probably just a confluence of memories. He's maybe, picking up bits and pieces here and there, and they're getting confused. But telling him would create unnecessary dissonance. He might lose some of the stability you've seen in him."

The son said, "Okay. We appreciate it, you know. He really does seem happier."

When the children had left, she returned to her desk, contemplating the new information. But maybe it was just a natural part of the process, all memory was, to some extent, an artificiality. In certain ways it's only having a shared narrative that allows memory to have any consistency at all among individuals. That was part of the reason, to begin with, that she had first given Bill the drug.

It was in the early stages of the clinical trials when he first took it. She was able to sneak the chemicals out without any issue, make her own doses and mixtures. It had a certain historical precedent after all. In the sixties psychiatrists would take

LSD to attempt to understand the schizophrenic mind. But she never took the stuff herself. Instead Bill had been her guinea pig. She wanted to look into the *subjective* effects. The problem with the clinical trial was it was designed only to measure a few key things, and no one had really expressed interest on the scientific level as to the thing's accuracy.

Bill, himself, was an eager participant. He had done his share of LSD, Psilocybin, and a few of the exotics. He was of the metaphysical persuasion, interested in self-experimentation the way she was interested in experimentation on others. It was his previous life, he liked to say, back in Berkeley with his first wife Anna.

For their first time out she wanted to try him on a memory that was heavily documented, so as to have a basis for comparison. They settled on their wedding, not for sentimental reasons, but because they had a wealth of artifacts and records: they had photographs, videos, letters, wedding gifts. They had redundancy through different mediums. Together, they wrote the script that she'd use to put him under. She placed him in their bed, gave him dark sunglasses, and gave him the injection.

He scribbled silently for an hour, trying to get down every particular detail. She leaned over his shoulder as he wrote. There was the incident of her father, going to walk his miniature poodle five minute before the reception. Then there was the best man, vomiting due to a wicked hangover. The maid of honor, dingbat that she was, locking her key inside her room.

He said, "these were the things that I had forgotten I suppose..." It was true, these were the minor instances that she had forgotten as well, just small smudges on her overall conception of the wedding. As they watched through the tape, they confirmed his notes, but she felt somewhat disappointed at the level of detail. Sure he

remembered that her father had been wearing a plaid bow-tie and that Fran, who was acting the part of their minister, had just gotten the frumpiest looking perm... but when he mentioned these things, she remembered them too, not even really needing the video to confirm them.

“Did you ever just wander around?” she asked. “Attempt to glean something more specific?”

“At one point,” he said, “early on, when I was entering into it. I looked down at the table that had the wedding gifts, and I saw something that I didn't remember before. It was a bottle of Rémy Martin cognac. The odd thing, however, is that I don't remember ever drinking it, or ever even seeing it once we had returned home.”

That piqued her interest. She had no memory of this bottle. She fast forwarded through the various wedding scenes trying to find a clear shot of the gift table.

“There!” he said, and she paused it. “Ah, but the bottle was on the left edge of the table, out of the shot.” She edged the video frame by frame, but the camera never veered the appropriate direction.

They consulted their wedding photographs, but the same problem presented itself. For some reason the left edge of the table was always out of frame.

“That's disappointing,” she said, “We have no way of confirming it.”

They tried the experiment a number of times. At first she recorded the results, trying to get a feeling for the consistency of the drug. Ultimately they ran out of documented events, not really being the home movies type. She kept bringing the drug home to him, however, and he kept retrieving memory after memory.

It was something that endeared her to him, at first. She was absent, herself, so much of the time, since she was working in this crucial stage of the trials. She

couldn't be with Bill, but Bill could be with her, albeit in this removed fashion. It wasn't something that was sudden, but crept up over time. No one realizes they're an addict until they're already in deep. The appropriate ratio of memory to the now had long been abandoned.

Ah, Bill, she thought. Is your perception of me changing with each iteration as well? Is your eye into the past really an eye into fantasy?

When she returned home, she was somewhat surprised to find Bill in his waking state. He sat in his office, the door open, with a cup of coffee in his hand.

“Hey,” she said.

“Hey.”

“How's the research coming?”

“Well enough,” he said.

His office was a space she rarely intruded upon. Everyone needs their sanctuary. With the rare glimpses she received, however, she noticed that over the past few months the space had given way largely to artifacts of the past. The walls had become plastered with photographs of old architecture, his desk littered with lists of pop songs and old paperbacks. He had said he was researching a new book, a side project to the editing work he did from home. She didn't necessarily find this unusual. He had a habit of shifting from project to project. Eerily though, the filing cabinet was open, and inside she could see a syringe in a wooden box, several vials of her mysterious medicine, and as though kindred spirits, were countless tapes, each with small labels too difficult for her to read.

She stepped deliberately across the threshold of the office. It made him nervous, she could tell, but why? She looked around at the photos on the walls. There were pictures of UC Berkeley's campus, a restaurant called the Mediterranean

cafe, and the Greek amphitheater.

“So you're working on something set in Berkeley then?”

“Yes, but you know, it's not formulated yet.”

“Of course,” she said. She watched out of the corner of her eye as he turned around and pushed the filing cabinet closed. As he was doing so, though, she noticed a photograph lying on a shelf. It was a older photograph, somewhat faded, but she noticed distinct shape and color of a cognac bottle, the name Rémy Martin. She snatched the photograph before he had turned around, stuffing it into her waistband.

He asked, “Are you hungry?”

She realized as he asked her this, that she hadn't eaten since breakfast, and the sun had long since set. “Yes,” she said, “I'm starved.”

They went downstairs together, and in a rare moment of intimacy, Bill made her an omelet and poured her a glass of wine. She devoured both ravenously.

“What's become of us, Bill?” she asked.

“What do you mean?”

“Or I guess, what's going to happen to us...” she said and pondered the novelty of speaking toward the future. Later, in the privacy of her own office, she took the photo from her waistband and examined it. It was a table of gifts, like at their wedding, but a different table. The cognac on the left side. This was the image when you reached the edge of the film strip. She was able to make out a label on one of the gifts, and it said, “To Bill and Anna with love.”

In the weeks following the incident where Anna had gone missing, he had been through many cycles with different memories attempting to trace a feeling that now persisted. Though they ran smoothly, he could no longer believe it as he once

could. He felt himself questioning every moment, searching her eyes for a falseness, some sign of inauthenticity, that she was not a true representation, but only a creation, and beneath her surface she was vacant, a puppet who only existed for him. But why should it matter, he thought? He had had dreams after all, natural ones that had appeared as vivid, but in them there was a certain spontaneity with the unconsciousness at work. Was that what was wrong? He had taken these experiential memories and solidified them, turning snapshots of truth in the unconscious, and distorting them, moving away from the particles of experience? He felt his grasp loosening, some sadness building in him, like she was leaving him again, slipping further away.

Lily had continued on unperturbed it seemed. Despite the strangeness of the one evening, she seemed more concerned in him, as if she had noticed the change. Certainly he was more guarded, more careful to do his dreaming, now, only after she had gone to sleep or was away at work, keeping the injections and tapes hidden away more carefully than before. But she still just seemed preoccupied with her work.

Whatever was happening seemed to simmer beneath the surface, until they went out for dinner and drinks with the Herbig's. They were in a hip bar, a place a bit too youthful for them. The servers wore suits and cocktail dresses, the walls were lined with emptied bottles of rare liquors and absinthe. They hunched over their table in the dim lighting and clatter of conversation.

Andrew Herbig had gone to medical school with Lily. Bill wasn't overly fond of either of them. Andrew seemed to have a smug superiority, and his wife, Emily, had always seemed dull to him, trying to engage with him about being the "house" partner. At one point the conversation turned to offspring.

Emily asked, "Why is it you two never had any children?"

Lily said, "I don't know. It just never seemed to me to be a priority."

"But you two are so beautiful," she said, "Your kids would be gorgeous."

"And," Andrew chimed in, "Sure to have quite a brain on them. It's not too late you know."

"Oh," Lily said, "Right now it would be impossible anyhow. With the trials going on."

"Right," he said, "your, drug. It's a surrogate child for you."

"Sure, but it requires my undivided attention just the same."

"Bill," he said, "what do you think about children? You've had two marriages and no kids."

Bill said hesitantly, "I don't see why there needs to be any particular imperative for an adult couple to have children. Why does that have to be a measure of success?"

"Oh you cynic," Emily said, "you only say that because you haven't *had* children."

Lily responded, "Come on now, that's circular logic. It's like saying Jesus will only come to you once you've accepted him into your heart."

"Well what of it?" she said. "You can't explain everything away with rationality you know, there are mysteries in life."

"Nonsense," Lily replied, "Having children's just a biologically driven desire. So is to defecate and fornicate and yet we control our impulses in that regard. We *chose* when and where."

"What about love?" Emily said. "You can't chose love, it just occurs, without ready explanation."

"But it's biochemical processes," she said, "touch, endorphins, sex

pheromones, there's nothing mysterious about it.”

Andrew said, “Spoken like someone who's never been in love.” A harsh silence broke out over the table. After realizing what he had just said he apologized, “Sorry, maybe one too many.” Nevertheless they ordered another round.

“Well, I think you're in the minority. Bill, aren't you a Catholic? Surely you have mystery...” he said.

Lily interjected, “He's not a real Catholic. He just likes the pageantry, the *idea* of the mystery.”

Bill, despite himself, blushed heatedly. “Yes,” he said, “There's mystery there. I sometimes wonder if love is genetic memory, or part of the collective memory, always a reenactment of the first union.”

Lily muttered, “Jungian nonsense.”

The Herbig's exchanged glances and tried to change the subject, but the damage had been done. Bill withdrew, losing interest in the conversation. He thought back to Anna, remembering her own sense of mystery that she brought to life, something that he was never able to quite replicate. She had a certain faith in the world. Catholicism was the only thing he could think of as a possible answer, some great expression of beauty in their architecture and music, something that couldn't be rationalized. It contrasted so clearly to Lily's cruelty at the moment that he felt that there must have been a turning point, a crossroad where he had gone so badly in the wrong direction. He began to get drunk in earnest, ordering drink after drink, and downing them quickly. He wanted to tear something out of himself, or maybe, merely, obliterate the moment, or perhaps, give himself courage to do a passion filled act.

There was a lull in conversation and he growled, “How can one love and be a

rationalist?”

And she just stared at him, blankly. The Herbig's excused themselves, saying they had best relieve the babysitter. They left his car at the bar and took a silent cab ride home. He stared out the window at the dark wavering streets, feeling her presence, feeling a rage that had built within her as well and yet, he could do nothing now to bridge that gap between them. It could only move one direction. If he could just reach out to put his arm around her, perhaps it could be dispelled, but he couldn't bring himself to do it. Something was rising in him. Not something monstrous, but something troubling, something like the vice of sloth, sloth that is pitiable, infects those around it, impossible to eradicate.

When they entered the household he poured a substantial amount of scotch into a white porcelain mug.

“Don't you think you've had enough to drink,” she said quietly.

She watched him as he took a liberal gulp. “I know what you've been doing. All the 'research'. It's sick, Bill, it's pathetic.”

He threw the mug to the floor. It didn't shatter, but acquired a crack running along its side. The amber liquid spread along the floor, and the smell filled the room.

“That's it,” she said, “I'm going to see what's on those fucking tapes.”

She walked briskly up the stairs to his office and Bill trailed behind her. He was ambivalent. In one way for her to hear the tape would be some sort of violation, but he wanted to hurt her like she had hurt him.

He shouted after her, “What is it you want from me?”

She emerged from the office door. “What do you think Bill? I want you present, I want you here for one goddamn second instead of your fucking dream space.”

She looked around the office. On his faded armchair rested a drawing, a sketched out feminine face.

“I mean, do you think I'm clueless as to where you go?” she yelled.

“I don't know... I mean. It's my memory, my past. What business is it of yours?”

“How do you think it affects me? Do you think I want you in here, in a masturbatory fantasy? Even when you're not in your dream-land you're half-present, always thinking about *her* aren't you? How do you think she would feel? That you're reliving your past with her, without her consent. Keeping all these images and details. Why don't we hear what's on this goddamn tape anyway. What is it, lewd details of her young flesh? Do you fuck her in your fantasy while you're sleeping in bed with me?”

She snatched his tape recorder off his desk.

“You don't have to do this,” he pleaded.

She defiantly pressed play. Out of the tape emerged his own voice, which made him feel, for some reason, shameful.

“We wake up on the couch at Gordon's house. I've put my heavy coat over us to keep us warm. As I wake you do too. We get up and step over a few other sleeping bodies hungover from the party before. We walk into the kitchen. Any illusion we had that we were casual, that this wasn't love seemed gone. We make a pot of coffee, and I reach over to kiss you. As I try to move away to pour the coffee you hold me tighter. I pour two cups of coffee and we walk out onto the porch that had a view of the bay. We share a cigarette. Somewhere between the lack of sleep, the hangover, the nicotine, and the stunning cool air, I feel timeless. As if this moment above any is outside of time. Gordon steps outside for a second. He says 'hello isn't it a beautiful

morning', but leaves right away, sensing in us, that we are outside the scene, outside the party. The morning, the friends, the coffee, the cigarette are all superfluous, there are only our eyes and hands locked together.”

She shut off the tape. He looked up at her. Tears were beginning to form at the edge of her eyes, and she brushed them away with her palm.

“Lily...”

She dropped the recorder, which broke on impact, the tape sliding across the wood floor. She left the room. He heard her walk down the stairs. Then he heard the sound of the garage door, the engine of her car purring into motion. He ran out the front door to see her driving down the empty suburban street, the car's headlights betraying a weave in its course.

The nurse was kind enough not to say anything when she found Lily asleep in the office armchair. The nurse even lent Lily a change of clothes she kept in a locker. It wouldn't look good to begin taking patients wearing her rumpled evening clothes. She had a terrible hangover. She was amazed that she had gotten there safely. She had never driven drunk in her life, and was shocked that she had done so, but she had felt at the time that there was no other alternative. Hearing the recording, her rage had drained away. It would have been easier to find him in bed with another woman. Instead she was dealing with a rate of decay, and Jost's law was not in her favor. If two memories are of equal length but different ages, the older memory will be forgotten less quickly. How could she compete with this ghost, with these moments being perfected?

She did love him. In her own way. Maybe it wasn't the passionate, romantic love, that seemed to burn so intensely in his past's eye, but she loved him. She loved

his quiet way of being in the world, loved even the Catholic mysticism, envious in a way, that she couldn't participate in it. In some ways, she loved vicariously through him and maybe if he had shared that love with her, maybe that would have been enough.

She was to him, she realized, an anesthetic and his tolerance increased over time. In him, she had ripped the pain wide open, the regression that had occurred possibly irreversible. The past was parasitising the now and the present was becoming the distant memory. Perhaps some repression is necessary to protect us from the intrusion of the past, a built in defense mechanism she had bypassed.

She moved through the day painfully, monitoring her subjects through headache and nausea (that sweet nurse, bringing her water, tea, and bagels to help her through that funk). But worse than her body was the pain of what waited for her at home. Or perhaps he would be gone. He hadn't come to the clinic, and hadn't even attempted to call. Where would he go? she wondered. Without Lily, he couldn't access his memory, and he could no more seek Anna out than he could have held on to her those many years ago.

At last came the end of the day, Mr. Orr. He came in cheery, though immediately sensing something as off. "You don't seem well today, doctor."

"It's nothing," she said, "The question is how are *you* doing."

"It's something that I wanted to be sure of," he said. "The trial is going to be over soon, right?"

"Yes," she said, "It is I'm afraid. We're going to be moving into the next stage. We expect that within about a year and a half the drug should be FDA approved for clinical use." Even as she said these words something about her professional tone disturbed her. Should this drug be unleashed into the world? She couldn't say. It

only appeared to do as promised, after all. “Do you have any concerns?” she asked.

“No, not concerns. I just... I think it's worked is all. I feel like I can remember her more clearly every day.”

“That's wonderful to hear,” she said.

“And I have you to thank for it, you to thank for giving me back my memories.”

“It's,” she stuttered, “It's nothing. It's just part of the trial.” She thought about what his children had said to her. His memories were manufactured.

The injection was delivered. Lily carefully counted down from the time they administered the drug. After several minutes she looked up from her wrist. Orr's eyes were open and he had a slight grin on his face.

“It's a dud, again, huh?” he said.

“It seems you've hit the jack pot.”

“So do I have to pretend that I don't know it's a dud?”

“No,” she said, “We can end the charade since you seem to know you've received the placebo. We really just test it that way in order to demonstrate that the drug has more efficacy than simple self-hypnosis.”

“Sure,” he said, “So what do we do now?”

“Well,” she said, “You could stay if you like, talk about whatever you want. It's your time here, with the testing. You get to have a free one on one with a psychiatrist if you like. Or, if you prefer, you could leave early, go home to your children.”

“Well, what do you suggest?” he said amiably.

She paused for a moment, then said, “May I ask you a question?”

“By all means.”

“How do you feel?” she asked, “How do you feel now that you've gotten her back?”

He seemed to think it over for a moment. “I don't know...” he said. “I mean, it's odd to use those terms right? It's odd to say I've gotten her back, because she's still dead. Still buried in the ground. But, I do feel, you know, for the first time since the accident, like things are going to be okay. Like I can remember her and that's enough. In that way it's like she's still living. Still a part of my life. I don't think I could have gone on without remembering her.”

There was something about Orr that was so earnest. That if he indeed wasn't really remembering his wife, he did honestly love her just the same, and experienced joy at being able to recover just a small part of that. She wasn't sure that she should fault Bill, fault him for wanting to recover that lost joy, a joy she had never really shared. Her loves had all been of admiration or practicality, they had never been driven by that incomprehensible passion that seemed to drive Orr and Bill.

“Is there something wrong?” Orr asked her.

“No,” she said. “There's nothing wrong.”

She decided then, that she wouldn't tell Orr what his children had said. Why should she reveal to him a truth that would shatter what little comfort he had? It would be a cruel thing: he would lose his wife again, and more tragically, with the knowledge that she was never his to begin with.

“You look sad,” he said. This struck her as oddly perceptive, never having had a patient inquire into her well being. “You can tell me. Doctor patient confidentiality applies both ways right?”

She smiled and said, “No. Actually it doesn't.”

“Well,” he said, “You can tell me anyway. I won't tell anyone.”

Lily looked for a moment out the window. She wished for a moment that she was Mr. Orr's wife. Then, at least, she could be lovingly remembered, by this quirky, oddly positive little man. For a brief moment she felt the urge to kiss him, but she shook the thought from her head.

“I'm having my own problems with memory,” she said.

After the clinic closed she lingered. The nurse was the last person out and gave Lily a sympathetic look as if to say, “I won't judge you, I've been in your shoes.” She had no desire to return home. Instead she strayed into the pharmaceutical room, saw the doses already prepared for the next day, color coded labels corresponding to the type and strength. Her hands floated across the vials, considering each one. She tried to think of a memory, somewhere that she could go, some moment that would be perfect, uplift her spirit out of this state. But as she pondered the doses, she realized there was no particular instance that she wanted to visit. There had never been a moment in her life of true exuberant happiness.

She picked up the vial of the drug without the stimulant. It would be the purest form. It would allow her to float free, hopefully to settle on some moment she had overlooked, any moment in which she had been truly happy. She would sift through her memory like a codex: random access, free from tyrannical sequentiality.

She sat in her own armchair, now both the doctor and the patient. At first she couldn't find a vein. She had given countless shots in her lifetime but never once had she done it to herself. It took her six tries and she winced with pain, but at last she found a vein and she pushed the plunger, the familiar pinch and burn of flu and tetanus shots. Although she observed the onset, she'd never of course, seen inside one of their heads into how it took hold of you. Would it happen quickly, jerked suddenly into the past, or would it be something barely noticeable, like the onset of truly

philosophical sadness, or the creeping surreality that was LSD. Would it overtake her in this spot . . .

Then she was waking up in the armchair to the face of the kind young nurse. She awoke with so much pain, filled with the pain that Bill would always be *her's* or maybe that *she* would always be Bill's, manipulated in his fantasy/memory like a puppet, the sounds of the recording acting as the strings . . . When she removed the headphones, for some reason she felt closer to him than she had felt since their honeymoon . . . In Colorado, in Aspen. They skied all day and, exhausted, retired to a suite where they had a soak tub and they bathed together and made love on the edge and dined out at a fashionable restaurant. They felt young and stylish, though they were both now aging, but neither ever having children in some way, made them still children themselves, as giddy as she was with her first kiss as a young girl . . . which was smooth and wet as they parted. After three weeks of adolescent flirtation with this odd little Indian boy, studying philosophy and into Marx, he finally kissed her. It was “nerd camp” that summer in upstate New York. He shuffled back and forth, this smart, funny man. She couldn't tell at that moment whether his tremors were because of her, or the lithium he was on, his illness making her romance *tragic*. Then fittingly the sky burst in one of those east coast thunderstorms, drenching her as she wheeled her baggage to the taxi, to catch her flight . . . A seaplane she took at ten years old, docked at Roche Harbor to take her back to Seattle. Her grandparents saw her off, as well as the ten year old boy, holding a garter snake. She thought she was in love, and braved holding the snake to show it. She held back tears as she boarded the plane, the propeller beginning to turn . . . She looked up at the ceiling fan and found herself questioning God at the age of five. If their air was circulating the stuffy sterile smell didn't show it. Her nanny was in the box in the corner. She decided she wanted to be

a doctor, to prevent this from ever occurring again. Her papa in his black suite leaned down with a crab leg in his hands, offering the sweet white meat to her . . . She was on the deck of a sailboat, examining a bucket filled with water, and the red insectile creature seemingly peered up at her. She tried to poke the little eyes, and was suddenly overcome with a searing pain that didn't let go, a claw grasped around her finger. Her mother reached for her, and with her strong hands unclasped the claw, and took her to her bosom and for a moment she was part of her mother again . . . She was ripped from herself, torn asunder. Immersed in a blinding light . . . She seemed to settle on an ocean. A spark of recognition that there *is* a self and there *is* a world, but they are one and the same, and there is contentment. Nothing to consider, a life yet to be lived and wasted, only a space for potential. We can only move up from here.